LONDON'S DIALECT

An Ancient Form of English Speech

With a Note on the Dialects
of
The North of England and the Midlands
and of Scotland

BY

MAC KENZIE MAC BRIDE

Author of *Arran of the Bens the Glens and the Brave; King Penda's Captain; Wonderful Weans*, etc.

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SIXPENCE NET

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LONDON'S DIALECT

AN ANCIENT FORM OF ENGLISH SPEECH

CHAPTER I

THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL AND THE LONDON DIALECT

MANY unkind things have been said about the Cockney dialect, but surely the unkindest cut of all is that contained in the recent[1] "Report of the Conference on the Teaching of English in London Elementary Schools," issued by the Education Department of the London County Council. The report says :—

"It must not be forgotten that London has a special responsibility for the maintenance of a satisfactory standard of English as a spoken or a literary medium. Many of the so-called provincial dialects are . . . survivals of older

[1] 1909.

forms of the language, and are thus historically and phonetically justified. When a boy or girl in Devonshire, Lincolnshire, or Yorkshire is taught to acquire the constructions of the King's English at the expense of his native forms of speech, there is a balance of loss and gain in the process. But with the pupil in the London elementary school this is not the case. There is no London dialect of reputable antecedents and origin which is a heritage for him to surrender in school. The Cockney mode of speech, with its unpleasant twang, is a modern corruption without legitimate credentials, and is unworthy of being the speech of any person in the capital city of the Empire. There, if anywhere, the endeavour should be made to diffuse as widely as possible the standard English which, as the result of a long process of development, has become the normal national means of expression."

This is an astounding statement, and one which I hope to show is entirely without foundation in historical fact; such a thing as a dialect which, in the words of the report, has "no reputable antecedents and origin," and which is

not "a survival of older forms of the language and thus historically and phonetically justified," does not exist.

Dialects are not deliberately invented ; they do not come up in a night like mushrooms. Speech is determined by natural tendencies, or unconscious local preferences, or by other dialects or languages.

Even in the case of deliberate affectations of speech such as the "haw haw" dialect of the would-be aristocrats of England, of "Kelvinside," or of Edinburgh, new forms are seldom, if ever, made. People merely imitate some form already in existence in another dialect of the same tongue which they think to be more refined than the speech of their fathers.

Curiously enough, there is no place in the kingdom more local than London : it is only cosmopolitan in its great and admirable tolerance of strangers.

WHAT THE LONDON DIALECT REALLY IS

The stranger enters, but he none the less pays his toll ; he does not leave any mark on London, but London leaves an indelible stamp

upon him. The children of the foreigner, the children of the Yorkshireman or Lancastrian, belong in speech neither to Yorkshire nor Lancashire, they become more Cockney than the Cockneys ; and even the alien voices of the East End, notably less musical than those of our own people, take on the tones of London's ancient speech.

In fact, so far from being affected by incomers, the characteristics of the dialect are, it has been pointed out, rather accentuated than diminished on the north side of London.

The London dialect is really, especially on the south side of the Thames, a perfectly legitimate and recognisable child of the old Kentish tongue to which we owe our earliest written literature.

The County Council's report clamours for a standard English ; this ancient dialect was the first standard English, and the Southern, or Wessex dialect of Alfred and of the English Chronicles which grew out of it, have also been set up as a standard by scholars.

The dialect of London north of the Thames has been shown to be one of the many varieties of the Midland or Mercian dialect, flavoured

by the East Anglian variety of the same speech, owing to the great influx of Essex people into London.

But it has, I think, also been strongly influenced in its most characteristic particulars by the Kentish of South London ; indeed, it seems to me to be really the Kentish influences rather than the Midland which mark the London dialect off so clearly from other forms of our speech.

NO STANDARD ENGLISH SPEECH

Covering a small area, it is little known outside, and thus people, like those who formed the L.C.C. Conference, mistake it for a mere foundling of the slums, instead of being, as it is, the tongue of the first written English, of the first English Church, of the first English scholars, and the first English schools.

No doubt, when the members of the Conference spoke in their report of a "standard English which has become the normal national means of expression," they had in their minds the dialect of the East Midlands and of Chaucer, but they do not seem to have been aware that this is closely akin to the North

London speech; they forgot that English never has been spoken as it is written by us to-day, either in the East Midlands, whence our written speech came, or in any part of the country, and, what is more, it never can be so spoken.

Their efforts to make us speak like copy-books, therefore, can never succeed, though they may do great mischief.

FORTY DIALECTS OF ENGLISH

The reason of this is that the English spoken vowels number at least fourteen and five diphthongs, and we have only six letters to represent them, or, adding the twenty-four consonants, we have forty-three sounds, and only twenty-four letters to represent them.

When we also remember that we have about forty varieties of dialect, not one of which is spoken as we write to-day, the hopelessness of the chase on which the Conference would have us set out may be imagined.

It will also be seen that it is absurd to state that there is a standard English which "has become the normal national means of expression," and the assumption that all the dialects

save Cockney are very good boys of respectable parentage, and that the Cockney is a very bad boy who does not know his own father, is not only unkind but quite untrue.

WHAT LONDON SAYS

To take a few well-known Cockneyisms: "Thet" for the word "that," *i.e.* "thaet," though in the opinion of a northerner not so round and full as "that," or the "thaat" of Lowland Scotch, is good Kentish, and the word was so spelt in Kent as long ago as the year 825 A.D.

It has been suggested by a high authority that the Londoner's "benk" for "bank," "keb" for "cab," "men" for "man," "kessins" for "cousins," are "modern refinements," but it seems to me they are of the same ancient Kentish origin as the pronunciation "thet," or as is "blest" for "blast," which was so written early in the ninth century in the same county.

The well-known "i" for "a," as in *Dily Mile* for *Daily Mail*, was so spoken from Trent to Thames in Elizabeth's time; it even encroached, as many other Mercian forms did, upon the

Southern or West Saxon speech. John Stow, writing in 1580, gives us "bylyffe" for our "bailiff."

Another London pronunciation of "a" which is very famous is "au," as in *Dily Telegrauph* for *Daily Telegraph.* "Au" is a perfectly legitimate development of "a" (which is one of the elemental vowels), and it occurs in early Southern texts.

The change of "o" = "u" into "a" or "ah" in words like "out" in "Git ahtsoide" for "Get outside," is due probably to Kentish influence. In "maw" for "mow," "raod" for "road," and "baot" for "boat," London has kept, like the Scots, the original sound of "o," which was "a" as in "hame."

This is good Kentish, and also Midland English, of old times. Barbour (1513) also, writing the Northern dialect, in his poem "The Brus" gives "apon" for "upon."

"Maighty" for "mighty" is Kentish, and is also North-East of England to-day.

The Cockney "mewn" for "moon" is Midland, and allied to the Northern and Scots "min" and "meen," "spin" and "speen," for

"moon" and "spoon" respectively, and "soide" ("suyde") is of Southern origin and is, of course, common all over the Midlands and the West of England.

"SPELL IT WITH A 'WE'"

I have dealt only with vowel differences, but, of course, there are many other things in which the Cockney's speech is better than that of those who teach him ; for instance, the Londoner says "kep" for "kept," "wep" for "wept," "slep" for "slept," all of which are the uncorrupted words, the "t" being merely an intruder.

That the judge who tried the famous case of Bardell *versus* Pickwick was familiar with the Cockney's habit, which is Kentish, and, I think, also East Anglian, of using "w" for "v" is shown by the question he put to Sam Weller as to whether he spelt his name with a "v" or a "w."

Sam's reply was, "I spells it with a 'V,'" and old Mr Weller, up in the gallery, thereupon called out, "Quite right, too, Samivel, quite right. Put it down a 'we,' my lord, put it down a 'we.'"

The Weller family were also true to the opposite Cockney habit of using a "v" for a "w," and Sam, on another occasion, speaks of there being "veels vithin veels," while his father offered to "come down wery handsome towards providing strait veskits for some people at home"; a generous offer which many of us would like to supplement with donations to-day.

Since Dickens's time this last Cockneyism has disappeared, or nearly so. The habit dates from the Anglo-Saxon settlement, and is common to German and Norwegian to-day, so is probably respectable enough even for the London County Council. The use of "u" for "v," as in the words "lou" or "lo'e" for "love," and "doo" for "dove," which is universal in Scotland, is identical with Mr Weller's "Spell it with a 'we.'"

THE QUESTION OF REFINEMENT

From what has been said it will be seen that London's dialect has credentials as "legitimate" as those of any dialect in the country; nay, representing, as it does, the first written form

of English, it is the most historic heritage and most instructive study of them all; and as it is encouraging to note that the members of the Conference express so strongly their appreciation of the value of the Lincolnshire, Devon, and Yorkshire tongues, it is to be hoped they will revise their opinion of London's speech. No good end can be served by an attempt to obliterate a dialect and to substitute one of many others which are in no sense more historic or valuable. We want to preserve as much individuality in the nation as possible, and this method of rubbing all down to one pattern only makes us more fit, as George Eliot put it, "to be packed by the gross."

We own nothing more interesting to the rest of Britain than the particular dialect we may speak, even though we and our neighbours have not yet realised the wealth of ethnological and historical fact which is embalmed in it, and which we can only discover by proper instruction and study. The Conference desires more refinement in the speech of the children of London, but seems to be unaware that refinement will not be gained by an attack upon their dialect: as

a distinguished scholar put it: "These provincial dialects were once literary dialects; they doubtless were, and still may be, spoken with as much refinement as our present literary English. On the other hand, literary English may be pronounced with just as much vulgarity as any other dialect, as when we run two syllables into one, etc. . . ."

The writer might have added that, though many persons may be found who speak their own dialect well and gracefully, it is practically impossible to find persons who speak what he calls "the literary dialect" without strong traces of their mother-tongue. That is, as I have already pointed out, such a thing as a literary universal dialect does not exist among us, and to try to manufacture one would be to throw away one of our best national assets in the shape of the local dialects which give us forty different sets of ideas and of sounds, and do so much to preserve local individuality and local patriotism.

CHAPTER II

WHICH IS THE PRETTIEST DIALECT?

THOUGH the London dialect is highly historical and literary, and is well worth preserving, it is not all the loss that would be ours if an attempt were made to establish a colourless and unhistoric speech evolved from the imagination or the taste of a handful of educated people resident in London. The Conference might well say that the Yorkshire or Lincolnshire child would suffer some loss in unlearning its native speech, for there can be no question that by every test of good and sonorous speech those dialects are superior to any "refined" English known. In all these "respectable" dialects the tendency in the main is to make the vowels thin and narrow, though the opposite tendency occurs in some sounds, as in the spread of the Southern broad "a," in "bawth" for "bath" and "aunt"

instead of the North-West Midland "ant." Undoubtedly the broad vowels are the more expressive and vigorous, and the trilled "r" of the Scotch and Welsh is a perfect mine of beauty to the speech of the people. The County Council Conference would certainly deprive us of all these things; indeed, the cult of the L.C.C. Conference is already doing so, for it exists in most districts more or less, and, though not powerful enough to destroy dialects totally, the movement plays to villadom, and a general cutting down of the native element is taking place. So that one of these days we shall find our school-children on their summer holiday writing to their parents in some such strain as the following early attempt at fine writing :—

"But the more remote parts of the ancient little kingdom, as Zetland, and the adjacent isles there, have found such a sting of deocular government within these few years, that these once happy isles, which long ago my feet treaded over, are metamorphosed in the anatomy of succourless oppression, and the felicity of the inhabitants reinvolved within the closet of a Cittadinean cluster."

Any one of the dialects is richer as a machine for the expression of thought than the written English, which has borrowed from outside instead of preserving and making the most of its own resources. It is, in fact, to the cutting-down methods we have adopted that we owe the difficulties the L.C.C. now complain of in the English of the masses—the narrow vowels, the clogged consonants, the impoverished vocabulary.

The consequence is that the Conference say they "are aware that educational investigators unite in deploring the initial poverty of vocabulary and the absence of facility in its employment among our children, and emphasise their almost universal resort to monosyllabic responses and broken phrases in framing answers even to the simplest questions. But," they add, "a little child has a by no means meagre store of elementary ideas, and he certainly possesses a vivid imagination and active powers of invention. Moreover, his inability to express himself fluently and promptly is no proof of absence of word material, or of a stock of sense experiences." . . . "It would appear," they add sagely, "the

more effective method to utilise—rather than ignore—the potentialities of this already existing stock of material, by training him to narrate in his own words some of the most interesting experiences of his own active life."

All this is a roundabout method of saying a very obvious thing which should have been realised long ago—that in training a child you must use the language a child knows, and not attempt to teach English to Welsh children by means of teachers who don't know Welsh, or English to Highland children by means of teachers who don't know Gaelic, or to London children by persons who wish to root up the only dialect the children understand. They are, moreover, ignorant of its history and origin, and, worst of all, allow the children to see that they despise it. They themselves say :—

"In London . . . the circumstances are unique. We have to face an importation or a corruption in the form of Cockneyism which has been in use for several generations, and which, notwithstanding the Education Acts, appears to be still flourishing. Most dialects

have their own distinctive charm and historical interest, but Cockneyism seems to have no redeeming features, and needs only to be heard to be condemned."

To be taught by a person who holds such views as these of the dialect we speak can only stultify the minds of the children and result in young people giving answers in the fewest words possible. Our language, as they further say, "tends in speech to become unduly weighted with consonantal sounds, some of which can only be articulated with the closed or partially closed mouth."

Both these faults arise from the ridicule and the repression to which the Cockney and other dialects have been subjected, so that the Londoner has abandoned all the grand old words which his tongue possessed practically up to the very time of the Education Acts, so much boasted. The excess of consonants, as I have already pointed out, certainly arises from the throwing away of the old inflections. And, though even the country dialects are suffering from the spread of snobbery, which in the main abhors a broad vowel; and from the efforts of

those who write English which is like an auctioneer's advertisement, it cannot yet be said that any one of them has the faults either of excess of consonantal sounds or of meagreness of vocabulary of which the Conference complains. These faults belong to the emasculated English of the drawing-room.

CHAPTER III

HOW WE HAVE IMPOVERISHED THE LANGUAGE

THERE can be no doubt that the loss of the old plural ending "en," as in "house, housen (houses)," which we still retain in the word "oxen," was a serious blow to the language. A liquid consonant like "n" gives beauty, but for this we substituted the form "es, as, is," which was originally used only for a single declension of nouns. In this way we got "mil*es*, day*is*, wound*es*, lass*es*." In some positions we still retain this suffix as a distinct syllable, as in the word "wishes," for instance, but in most cases it was ultimately cut down to simple "s." Thus the sibilant sound was brought right up against the last consonant of the noun, as in "lads, men's, leav's," in place of the much prettier, "Still under the leav*is* green."

So in "en" we lost a better suffix than "es," and then we cut away the vowel which so greatly helped "es." Thence followed a whole train of evils, by the addition of this "s" to many words—adjectives, pronouns, and adopted foreign words—the effect of each step being to reduce the vowels and increase the sibilation of the language.

We took another false step in casting out the sound of the final "e" in certain words like "blithë," "dredë" (dread). But worst of all was the alteration of the suffix "ende" in the Midlands, "inde" in the Southern, and "and" in the Northern dialects, in the participle, to "ing." By this we get "coming," "going," in place of the old "comande" or "cominde," "goende." The sound "ing" is one of the most difficult and nasal in the language, and greatly inferior to the liquid "n" in "ande" or "inde."

The change arose purely owing to the confusion of the sound of "ind" or "and" with the verbal-noun suffix "ung" or "ing," as in "hunting," "sleeping," "wooing," "rising," etc.

Some of these suffixes are still retained in the dialects. Says the song :—

> "Saw ye Johnnie comin, quo' she, saw ye Johnnie comin,
> Wi' his blue bonnet on his heid, an' his doggie rinnin quo' she an' his doggie rinnin."

In all the dialects the inconvenient form "ing" is, in fact, avoided instinctively, even in the case of words like "farthing," "shilling"; but the L.C.C. Conference evidently intend to make a stand for this very intrusive stranger, though in the participle it certainly has no "historical antecedents." They say of London's speech, "Vowel sounds are ill moulded. There are also organic substitutions, as 'f' for 'th' and 'n' for 'ng,' which should be rectified as early as possible." That is, a Conference which makes complaint of the "clogging" of consonants proposes to further clog them by insisting on the pronunciation of a most clogged combination of sounds.

An increase of the hissing sound which makes English "the most unvocal of all modern tongues" was caused by the loss of the ancient and once widely used suffix "eth," in

the present tense, third person singular, of verbs—"he cometh not" is certainly prettier than "he comes not," and gave a pleasant variety.

A still greater misfortune was the casting out of some of the most valuable things in the language in the shape of hundreds of preterite, that is, past perfect forms of verbs, most of which, as Mr MacKay put it, "formed the bone and pith of the language of our forefathers and make the beauty and strength of the Bible in many of its noblest passages." These forms are still largely in use in the country, and can only be preserved by the encouragement of a knowledge of the old dialects. We once had "slide, slad, sliden," "write, wrat, written," "strike, strack, stricken," and many others, some of which have entirely disappeared. These and a great number of diminutives are our chief losses.

This is not a scientific treatise, and it is unnecessary to follow this part of the subject further. It seems to me that not one good word can be said for the changes I have described. To poets and writers generally the

old forms would have been a great boon, would certainly have added to their chances of attaining power, sweetness, and variety in all kinds of literary work.

The words I have given are only a few of many hundreds in use in Chaucer and in Shakespeare's times, which are preserved in the dialects. As Mr James Colville of Glasgow said in a letter which appeared in *The Glasgow Herald* some time ago: "I maintain that the Scot who has preserved contact with his country's soil and its speech is in a better position than the Southron, with his multiform enfeeblements, to understand Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, phonetically, idiomatically, etymologically, to say nothing of what the stylish call 'atmosphere.'" This is true to a great extent of persons who know any of the dialects.

In support of Mr Colville's contention, I may say that in Chaucer, it has been estimated, there are six thousand words which are practically unknown to the ordinary English reader, while in Shakespeare there are in most glossaries nearly three thousand words which the

editors consider it necessary to explain. A Scotsman with a fair knowledge of his country's tongue can, in my own experience, read Chaucer without serious difficulty, as can also any person with a good knowledge of Midland or any other English dialect.

To a Cockney, it must be admitted that Chaucer presents great difficulties, the reason being that, though Londoners have retained the pronunciation practically intact, they have allowed themselves to be laughed out of most of the fine old words which they retained right up to the days of Dickens.

CHAPTER IV

THE KING'S ENGLISH

As I have said, there is no such thing as a one and only spoken "King's English" in existence, though the L.C.C. Conference seems to think there is. The King is really much better off than if he possessed only one single dialect. In writing, it is true, the nation has adopted a certain spelling, which does not fully represent any of the many dialects the nation speaks. In this way we have quite by accident been very impartial.

The position then is, that if the Conference insists upon attempting the gigantic task of establishing a dialect in London, it will be obliged to choose between many.

I have endeavoured to show that, though the Cockney dialect has been accused of being a workhouse child of unknown parentage, it can

produce its birth-certificates for a thousand years, certificates of which the oldest member of the House of Lords would be proud ; so that no dialect of spoken English can be better entitled, on ground of extreme antiquity on the Kentish side of its house, to be selected. But it is clear that the L.C.C. Conference, owing to its prejudices, prefers the Lincolnshire or Yorkshire or Devonshire, and seems unaware of the fact that, of the dialects it selects, the Lincolnshire is a child of one of the two households to which the Cockney belongs ; it is one of the Midland varieties ; while the Devonshire is a younger daughter of the other household—the august old Kentish stock.

If, however, the Conference decides to make beauty rather than high lineage the qualification, let us see what it will have to choose between by weighing well the following passages from masters of the dialects mentioned. The writers, of course, as I have pointed out, cannot with our imperfect alphabet represent the sounds exactly, but anyone with an imagination who has ever heard the spoken words can form an excellent idea of them.

For those who are not familiar with it, I will give first a specimen of the London dialect from Mr Arthur St John Adcock's well-known *Billicks* :—

"Fact is, guv'ner, love's a good deal loike drink. It orfn mikes a man silly, an' 'e's merried by the toime 'e's sobered dahn, an' that keeps 'im fairly sober, sometoimes, for the rest of 'ees life. . . . It's mos'ly the sime in love as it is in drink ; a men don't foind 'ees tongue till 'e's lorst 'ees 'ed ; but the woman, she sort of says to 'im, 'You foind the love, an' I'll foind the tongue,' she says ; an' thet's all it amarnts to. A very sensible arringement too ; for though a woman miyn't knaow 'er own moind, you can alwis depend on 'er to knaow the moind of the man who wants to merry 'er, even wen 'e down't quoite knaow it 'isself."

And this is the way in which John Fry speaks in Blackmore's Devonshire *Tales from the Telling-House* :—

"How many of ours, John Fry? Quick now." "Dree score and vower, Maister, cardin to my rackonin. Dree score and zax it waz uz toorned out, zeventh of June, God knows it

waz. Wan uz killed, long of harvest-taime; and wan tummled into bog-hole, acrass yanner to Mole's Chimmers."

Even this is considerably watered, so we will take a sample from the North Devon dialect, which differs little from that spoken by Shakespeare in his home on the other side of the hills. That he knew it well is shown by the frequent use of it in his plays. The quotation is from "Jim an' Nell, a Dramatic Poem in the Dialect of North Devon," by W. F. Rock, 1867:—

"Lewy, he'll Bet a cup of zider;
Or Jan, thee zitt'st tha naist o' zide her
An' doattiest 'pon the gurl.
Why, buoy, art bosky, or scoochy-pawed?
Thee'st slottered all thee drink abroad;
Ott makes thee luke sa thurl?

Ther's Lew a-glintin' at thy maid!
I marvel Lewy's isn't vraid,
Thee'rt zich a stuggy brute:
Why ott doth luke sa gallied vor?
Tha luve that hath a jillus mor'
'll bear a bitter vruit.

I'll warn, thee neesn't vear o' Bess,
Hur used vor slammocky hur dress,
But now hur frap'th up tight;

Hur used vor ha' a poochy way,
But now hur's mostly peart an' gay,
Laist re'el zet her right."

These are fine dialects, and were once the speech of a great nation—the West Saxons—and of King Alfred.

The following from Tennyson's *Northern Farmer* is in the Lincolnshire dialect, which, while it is classed with the Midland dialects, stands to some extent apart from them :—

"Wheer 'asta beän saw long and meä liggin 'ere aloän,
Noorse? thou'rt nowt o' a noorse: whoy, Doctor's abeän an' agoän :
Says that I moänt 'a naw moor aäle : but I beänt a fool :
Git ma my aäle, fur I beänt a-gawin to breäk my rule.
Doctors, they knaws nowt, fur a says what's nawways true :
Naw soort o' kind o' use to saäy the things that a do.
I've 'ed my point o' aäle ivry noight sin I beän 'ere,
An' I've 'ed my quart ivry market-noight for foorty year.
. . . . . .

Dubbut looök at the waäste : theer warnt not
feeäd for a cow ;
Nowt at all but bracken an' fuzz, an' looök at it
now—
Warnt worth nowt a haäcre, an' now theer's
lots o' feeäd,
Fourscoor yows upon it an' some on it down i'
seeäd."

Here is a specimen of old Yorkshire (1826), which belongs to the old Northern dialect, though it differs considerably from the speech of Northumberland :—

"Ah's Yorkshur by ma truly ! Ah wor bred and boorn at canny Yatton, aside o' Roasberry Toppin."

"Roseberry Toppin ! — where is that my pretty maid ?"

"Sairtainly God ye know Roasberry ? Ah thowght onny feeal hed known Roasberry— It's t' biggest hill i' all Yorkshur. It's aboon a mahle and a hawf heegh, and as cawd as ice at top on't, i' t' yattest day i' soommer ; that it is."

"You've been in some service, I suppose ?"

"Hey, ah'll uphod ye hev I, ivver sin I wor neen year awd . . . an' as good a servant

I've been, thof ah say it mysel', as ivver coom within a pair o' deers. Ah can milk, kern, fother, beeak, brew, sheear, winder, caird, spin, knit, sew, an' deea iverything 'at belangs tiv' an husbandman, as weel as onny lass at ivver wore clogshun ; an' as to my carracter, ah defy onny boddy, gentle or simple, to say black's my nail."

These are the three dialects of which the Conference says that, when a child who speaks one of them is taught to acquire the constructions and accent of the "King's English at the expense of his native forms of speech, there is a balance of loss and gain in the process." It thus admits their merits.

As we have come so far, we will take a sample of the actual dialect of Northumberland as it is now spoken. It is the second oldest as a literary dialect, and gave us some of our best writers, like famous Caedmon, Bede, and Richard Rolle.

The quotation is from a poem by a Tyneside song-writer, Joseph Wilson, who was born in 1841, and who stated that "joost twenty minits efter he myed his first ippearince, te the

'stonishment o' the neeybors, his broother Tom showed his fyce to dispute wi' 'im whe shud be the pet o' the family."

"Coom, Geordy, had the bairn,
Aw's sure aw'll not stop lang ;
Aw'd tyek the jewel mesel,
But really aw's not strang ;
Thor's flooer and cooals te get,
The hoose-turns thor not doon,
So had the bairn for fairs,
Ye've often deund for foon !

Then Geordy held the bairn,
But sair agyen his will ;
The poor bit thing was gud,
But Geordy had ne skill ;
He haddent its moother's waäys,
He sat both stiff an' noom,
Before five minutes wes past
He wished its moother wad coom ! "

The members of the L.C.C. Conference would be shocked to see, from this and the other extracts, that the Cockney form "fyce" [1] for "face," and "myed" for "made," "tyek" for "take," are current in the North, as is also "agyen" for "again," etc.; that in Devon,

[1] Written "fyce," and very nearly so in sound : the Lancashire is "faihice."

Dorset, the West, and the Midlands they use the original sound of "a" for "o" just as the Cockneys do, as in "Darset"; that even the "r" which the Conference points to as being added by Cockneys in words like "barrow" and "draw" is added in the same manner by the natives of Royal Wessex, who say "zarrerful" for "sorrowful," "vallered" for "followed" and so on. In short, most if not all the things the Conference object to in Cockney speech may be found in some one of the three dialects upon which they have bestowed their affections.

CHAPTER V

THE POWER OF THE OLD DIALECTS

It must not be supposed, because the quotations are humorous, that these dialects are not capable of expressing serious thought, or sentiment, or pathos. It is unfortunate that their literary career stopped short so early. The Scottish dialect, however, has had a long literary career and has given abundant proof of its great fitness for rendering all shades of feeling; nor does literary English in any way surpass it in delicacy or refinement. It needs a great poet to be really successful in literary English, but many minor poets have been successful in broad Scots. Take the following stanza, which was written by a ploughman. It is said, by the way, to be the most popular Scottish song at the present day.

"When owre the hill the eastern star
Tells bughtin time is near, my jo,
And owsen frae the furrow'd field
Return sae dowf and wearie, O:
Doon by the burn, where scented birks
Wi' dew are hangin' clear, my jo,
I'll meet thee on the lea-rig,
My ain kind dearie O."

There is no clogging of consonants here, nor in such fine opening lines as :—

"He's owre the hills that I lo'e weel,
He's owre the hills we daurna name,
He's owre the hills ayont Dumblane"—

lines which are a good illustration of the great beauty of the long vowels "ee," "au," "oo," "ow," and "aa," and of the trilled "r."

Nor could literary English bring home to us with more graphic power and poignance the following picture from a well-known poem by a bard whose very name was forgotten until rescued recently by Mr James Cairns Meikle of Glasgow :—

"In a wee cot hoose far across the muir,
Whaur peeseweeps, plovers, and whaups cry drearie,
There leeved an auld maid for mony lang year
Whaum ne'er a wooer did e'er ca' dearie;

Oh a lanely lass was Kate Da'rymple,
A thrifty quean was Kate Da'rymple ;
Nae music except in the clear burnie's wimple
Was heard roun' the dwallin' o' Kate Da'rymple."

The old tongue responds equally well in the merciless description of the following stanza :—

" Her face had a smack o' the gruesome and grim,
Which did frae fash o' the wooer defend her,
Her lang Roman nose nearly met wi' her chin,
Which brang folk in mind o' the auld witch o' Endor :
A weegle in her walk had Kate Da'rymple,
A sneevle in her talk had Kate Da'rymple,
And mony a cornelian and cairngorm pimple
Did blaze upon the dun face o' Kate Da'rymple."

But we need not go so far afield ; all the really great things in British literature have been written, not in Latin-English, but in the old, short, simple, plain words like these. All our really great sonnets notably are practically in English monosyllables. Wordsworth's " The world is too much with us," save for one proper name, has in it no word of more than two syllables, and out of its total of one hundred and forty words only, one hundred and seventeen are monosyllables. Much the same may be

said of his "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room" and his other most perfect poems; of Leigh Hunt's Nile sonnet, of Keats' "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art!" or his "On first looking into Chapman's Homer," of Rossetti's "Refusal of Aid," and of Milton's Piedmontese sonnet.

The extract (quoted on page 19) from the L.C.C. Conference Report upon which the speech of London in the future may to a great extent depend, has the same total of words that we get in a sonnet, yet it contains thirteen words of over three syllables, or no less than thirty of over two syllables, while some of the sentences used by the Conference are as sibilant as a display of fireworks at the Crystal Palace. They have some forty-eight sibilants, or seventeen more than Wordsworth's poem, out of a total of one hundred and forty-three words. Moreover, some of the expressions used, such as "word material," "initial poverty of vocabulary," "stock of experiences," "word stock," are vague and redundant. In another place they say that "a child's ability to understand language always transcends its power of

expression"; and again: "Truths steal into the hearts of children, without taking definite content, long before the teacher attempts to put them into storied action."

We certainly would rather that the children should be taught the monosyllables of Wordsworth or Milton, or even of "Owd Neddy Fitton," than such English as this!

CHAPTER VI

THE LANCASHIRE AND YORKSHIRE DIALECTS

The Lancashire dialect of the Midland tongue is an exceedingly fine one, very expressive, very strong and vigorous in pronunciation and in its use of full broad vowels ; and, on the whole, it is admirably spoken in its native district. Indeed, the dialect itself has a peculiarity which ensures good articulation and is a guarantee against slipshod methods. It is the very opposite of the dialect, for example, of Bucks, for instead of slurring over the final syllable, as a Bucks man does when he speaks of "buh'r" for "butter," the Lancashire dialect lays a deep stress upon the last syllable of a word ; he says "arrange*ment*," "wilder*ness*," "oppo*site*," and so on.

I have elsewhere suggested as a possible explanation of this peculiarity that it arose

originally from the fact that the Lancashire people are mainly of British origin. It will be noticed that, when a Welshman speaks English, he lays the stress upon the second of two words ; he says, "How *are* you to-*day*?" The effect is exceedingly pretty and musical, and of course does away with any possibility of slurring syllables. Writing upon this peculiarity some years ago, I pointed out that "there is another and a curious evidence of the presence of the different branches of the Keltic-speaking races in the sub-dialects of the various districts of Scotland, an evidence to which attention has never yet been called, so far as I am aware. In the Welsh language the stress or accent comes always on the latter of two syllables, whilst in the Gaelic it is laid upon the first of two, the word as it were dwining away towards the end. In the broad Scots of Strathclyde the first-named peculiarity is observable. Unconsciously following the genius of his old British mother-tongue, the native of that neighbourhood invariably lays the accent on the latter half of the word, as in 'Cath*cart*,' 'Loch-*head*,' 'Bal*four*,' 'Gil*mour*.' This is very notice-

able. On the other hand, in those districts which were peopled by a Gaelic-speaking race, as in the county of Linlithgow, for example, the same names would be pronounced '*Cath*cart,' '*Loch*head,' 'Balfer,' 'Gilmer.' In Galloway, where a Gaelic people learnt English from the British of Strathclyde, the same method of throwing the accent of two-syllable words back to the second syllable is the rule, as in the names 'Bar*holm*,' 'Ag*new*,' etc. This is one of the most striking differences between the dialect of the East Midlands of Scotland and that of the South-West."

The Lancashire dialect has also a strong intonation : it cannot compare with the Welsh-English in grace and music, or in the wonderful beauty of the finely trilled "r" ; features which make the Welshman's English the most musical speech between the Cheviots and the South Downs, yet in point of vigour and strength the Lancashire tongue is unsurpassed on the south side of the Border.

But besides their wealth of strong vowel sounds and their historic interest, the provincial dialects possess many interesting and expressive

words. Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the Border districts are particularly rich in this respect. Lancashire has preserved such capital words as "clemmed" for "starved," "nesh" for "tender" "sensitive"; and "singlet" for "vest" or "undershirt" where the Scotch has preserved the French "semmit." The Lancashire "gradely," to do a thing in a large manner, is allied to the Gaelic "gradanachd." The word "threap" is also an excellent one known in other districts, and "stent" is I think, still in use, as in Burns :—

> "Yestreen, when to the stented string
> The dance gaed through the lighted hall."

The following is from a Lancashire sketch, "Owd Neddy Fitton's Visit to the Earl o' Derby," published I think in the seventies. The writer signed himself simply "M. R. L." :—

"'That's naught but God's truth,' aw said, 'for we are th' very owdest tenants yo han'; for my greyt-greyt-gronfeyther, owd Andrew Fitton, wur i' th' battle o' Wiggin, un saved th' Earl's loife; un see yo ut this 'ere coolour,' aw said, pooin it eawt o' my pocket, 'this is th' very one ut he carried wi' him, i' that battle; un yo may luke at it heaw it's rented wi' th' boes.'

"'Well, Neddy, my man, when did you come at this?'

"'Well, aw'll tell yo. After th' battle war o'er, th' Earl, yer greyt-greyt-gronfeyther, gave it to my greyt-greyt-gronfeyther, un a lease o' this very farm ut aw've coom here abeawt, as yon wastrel wants to tak off me; but aw hope ut yo waint let him do such a loike thing to me, win yo?"

The following is from "The Wayver o' Welbrook," by the well-known writer in the Lancashire dialect, Ben Brierley :—

"Yo gentlemen wi' yor leawnds and yor parks,
Yo may gamble and sport till yo dee;
But a quiet heause-nooke, a good wife and a buke,
Are more to the likins o' me-ee.

. . . . . .

Some folks liken t' stooff their owd wallets wi' mayte,
Till they're as reaund an' as brawsen as frogs;
But for me I'm content, when I've paaid deawn my rent,
Wi' enoogh t' keep me oop in my clogs-ogs."

CHAPTER VII

WHAT THE "HAW HAW" DIALECT IS

Few people in England speak without strong traces of local dialect, but there have been attempts to manufacture a speech which is more refined, in the opinion of the persons concerned, than the speech of the people around them. It is curious that in most of these attempts the so-called refinements consist in merely taking habits of one or more other dialects, so that most corrupt of all are the affected dialects. Such are those of the Oxford graduate, or of "Kelvinside," or of the smart youths of Edinburgh, ambitious only to be considered "well put on." The L.C.C. Conference will be surprised, if not shocked, to learn that the dialect they despise — the Cockney — is that from which most of the snippets are borrowed, so that London's

dialect is in this way avenged. For instance, the thin "ae" or "e" of London, as in "thet," is largely borrowed; it was adopted in Kelvinside, and is adopted by English people who wish to appear refined. None the less, as I have pointed out, it is one of the oldest Cockneyisms, dating from the ninth century. The young parvenu who goes to Oxford, and the same person in the north-west of England, where the sharp "e" is the dialect form also, both say "bawth," "pawth," and "cawstle"; but the ambitious Londoner, knowing that this is the genuine Cockney sound, says "beth," and "peth," and "gless." The "haw haw" dialect also gives us "maighty" for "mighty" and "mahle" for "mile"; so also does Kelvinside. This is, as I have pointed out, good Kentish and old Midland and Yorkshire; "Kelvinsaide" for "Kelvinside" comes in the same category.

So that here we have two opposite tendencies —one to make the vowels thin, as in "thet," the other to broaden them, as in "bawth."

I recently heard a lady in a London railway carriage who spoke in what she seemed to

consider an ultra-aristocratic manner; she said "beck" for "back," which is Kentish; "knaaoo" for "know," or as near that sound as possible, which seems to be like the "cnaue" of Wyclif of 1382, or the "knaoo" of North Lancashire. For "one" she used "wan"—not "waun," but the sound you get if you spell the word "van" with a "w" instead of a "v." This is a reminiscence of the fifteenth century, when they placed a "w" before "an," the old word which grew into "one." It originated in the Midlands. Next the lady spoke of someone "kemming haome." This is the Northern "cam" for "come," which is still in use in Scotland and, I believe, in parts of Northumberland.

"Cam ye by Athol, lad wi' the philabeg,
Doon by the Tummel or banks o' the Garry?"

wrote James Hogg. In saying "haome" she gave the "a" sound of "o," which is the original sound, and still in use in the North, where they say, "Hame's best"; but to this the lady had added "oo," which brings it nearer to Lancashire "whom" or "hoom." She went on to say that something had "fegged

him"; and here she came back to Kent, London, and the ninth century, as she did also in saying "heear" or "heaw" for "here," which is close to the old German "hiar." "Kessans" seems also to be a Kentish thinning of the vowel, as in the diphthong "thaet" = "that"; as does also her "engry" for "angry"; while "glauss" is good Cockney, "au" being a quite natural and proper development of the original "a." She said also "gaoos" for "goes," which seems to be a slight refinement of the Cockney "gows," that is, "gaoos" with a less full sound of "a." Finally, she said "ae" for "I," the pronoun.

From all this it will be seen that of all dialects the aristocratic lingo is the most corrupt, most mongrel, least historic. For, though the words and sounds are of respectable ancestry, they come from many parts, and are as heterogeneous a crowd as the passengers on an emigrant ship. Taken as a collective whole they have no "antecedents." To me it seems that even the least historic of the dialects would be better than any of these highly respectable affectations which seem to

meet the taste of the well-to-do. One of them would be the only alternative for the Conference to choose if it were to reject the country dialects and the Cockney.

Fortunately, though a County Council may do many things, it cannot make a dialect. It can, however, do much damage to an existing one. The L.C.C. has removed many of the most interesting and most ancient of the nation's landmarks from the streets of London, forgetting that association, romance, are to utilitarianism as the sun to the little planet Mars, in their influence for good on the education of young people and upon human character. The memory of poor Nell Gywnne was as the scent of lavender in one's nostrils before they swept away the old house near St Clement's linked with her name; and the memory of loyal and beautiful characters like Lovelace and Blake and a score of others, makes Fleet Street and the Strand still fragrant. What could more inspire a boy with a noble spirit than that the citizens should estimate as a possession above wealth or utilitarianism a house that told of Shakespeare or Hampden,

Sidney or Keats? In what way could a community more strongly show to the coming generation its appreciation of courage and loyalty or great gifts?

If so much of human sentiment can surround a house, how much more is there in a dialect! Language is the greatest of all a nation's landmarks; words throb, they are instinct with the life, not merely of individuals, but of the race, handing on the very influences that turned them this way in Kent, that way in Northumberland, a thousand years ago.

As Mr Peile pointed out, all these dialects of ours were once literary dialects, and can be spoken with as much refinement as the County Council desires.

Even if it were possible for the L.C.C. to establish a new mode of speech in London, it is most doubtful whether the new would be an improvement on the old; the gain would be problematical, the loss certain. It would be as though they had suddenly decided to alter the names of all the streets in London, and so to wipe out their links with the past. The act would please only a handful of very prosaic

people. Our visitors and strangers generally would be least pleased of all. Yet far more interesting to strangers is our speech, just as theirs is to us. When the writer was living in a Scottish town some time since, he was visited by a journalist friend from England, who on returning from sight-seeing on the very first day of his visit exclaimed, "Why, I'm disappointed, I haven't heard anyone speak Scotch!" I replied that there were some people in the town who had neither ears for musical speech, such as the splendid dialect of Edinburgh, nor hearts that were capable of patriotic appreciation, but that they were only a handful, and I could take him where there was plenty of good "braid Scots."

A stranger is always pleased, not to find that a foreign country is like his own, but to find that it is unlike; and this, I venture to think, is the right spirit—provided, of course, that he does also heartily, yet not blindly or uncritically, appreciate his own land and kin. To my mind broad Yorkshire should be heard in that great county, Welsh in Wales, Gaelic in the Highlands, while Cockney fits admirably the character,

the humour, the tolerance so characteristic of the London people. As the poet puts it :—

"Naiad for Grecian water,
Nymph for the mountain side,
But old Cornwall's bounding daughters
For fair Dundagel's tide."

CHAPTER VIII

A BOON TO WRITERS

A GREAT advantage of a knowledge of one of the English dialects is that, while a person who attained to the standard desired by the Conference would thus have the pronunciation of the dialect of the London drawing-room, the most mongrel speech in the country, and a vocabulary of foreign waifs and strays, the man with a knowledge of a country dialect possesses the enormous advantage of being practically bi-lingual, and can draw from the written English or from the more copious dialect of Gloucester or Yorkshire or Edinburgh at need.

This was what Robert Burns did, and it was to this he owed much of his wonderful power ; for dialect is far more humorous than literary English, possesses many more rhymes, and a far

greater store of the diminutives which give grace and tenderness. Even in the most English of his poems like "Afton Water," he was indebted to the mobile and beautiful dialect of the North.

There can be no doubt that the large mass of dialect literature which has been produced, especially in Lancashire and Yorkshire, owes its fine qualities, in the same manner, to the wider vocabulary, fuller vowel sounds, and greater variety given by the preservation of many of the old forms and inflections. How admirable this literature is, let those who can, see for themselves by getting the works of "Tim Bobbin," Ben Brierley, Edwin Waugh, Trafford Clegg, and John Hartley in the Northern dialects, or of Mr Barnes in that of Dorset.

CHAPTER IX

A SIMPLE CURE

If the beauty of a language, as is agreed, must be judged by the frequency and fulness of its vowel sounds, then clearly the written English which the Conference had in its mind is the poorest of all English dialects. So that, save so far as their valuable teaching of music is concerned, the tendency of the instruction approved by the Conference, it should be clearly understood, is against a beautiful and historic speech. Moreover, their preference for long Latin words in written English would have the effect of discouraging the vocabulary of speech, as the short English words are those chiefly used in all conversation.

How can we cure these evils? Are we further to ruin a noble tongue by "weighing it down" with consonantal foreign words, and con-

tinue to throw out native words full of good vowels?

Monsieur Jourdain was greatly surprised to discover that he had been talking prose all his life without knowing it, and the Conference should realise that try how they may they cannot get away from dialect. Their south-country members will come much nearer the dreaded Cockney dialect than they are aware in saying, as most of them certainly will, either "graunt" or this sound slightly modified into "grarnt," while the north-country members, if there are any, will say "grant." The southerners will again say "bawth" or "barth," which is as distinctly southern, only not so full and effective in sound; they will also say "pauth" or "parth," "ausk" or "arsk," "aunt" or "arnt," "telegrauph" or "telygrarph," "chaunce" or "charnce," "laust" or "larst," "caustle" or "carstle," "paust" or "parst," and they will probably every one of them say "thet" instead of the fuller "thaet" or "thaat" of the west and south of England, and of Scotland generally.

The northerners will, no doubt, mostly give for these sounds "bath," "ask," "ant," "tele-

graph," "chance," "last," "castle," "past." There will probably be differences as striking in their use of other vowels, such for instance as "o." Yet, despite these differences, there will be no superiority in the speech of either party in the matter of refinement.

It is, therefore, in this and not in a special set of vowel sounds used by the wealthy, that good speech consists; on the contrary, there can be no doubt that if the poor of London had the refinement of ear and knowledge of music, and the habit of *giving full articulation to the vowels*—of bringing out the rounded "ae's" and "oe's" as Tennyson, if I remember rightly, put it—they would speak better than their teachers because they preserve the fuller and purer vowels of the old tongue, and would use monosyllables, for English is a monosyllabic tongue.

What we want then it seems to me, is to teach them—

(1) That the dialect they speak is not a mere "corruption or importation without a redeeming feature," as the Conference has stated, but a tongue rich in fine sounds and strong words, and is of the most distinguished origin.

(2) That it is not desired that they, being southerners, should clip their vowels from the full southern sound as in "chaunce" to "charnce" or that northerners should adopt the southern sound instead of their characteristic "chance" etc.

(3) That what is wanted is that they should articulate fully, and set high value on the musical instruction so admirably given by the Council.

(4) Should acquire a good knowledge of the homely English words of the writers in the dialects to which they are most allied in speech, which in the case of London would be those of Kent and the East Midlands.

This would have the effect of restoring to the people's tongues a great number of obsolete words, and would also preserve the old inflections still in use in the country. The dialects thus receiving the accolade of respectability, there would be a great awakening of interest in them, and Old English being a language of short, simple words, many old nouns and verbs would certainly become popular with children who never will use the long Latin words so loved of conferences.

A real mastery of any English dialect—and of course, the one we speak is the easiest to master —with its old forms and inflections, and especially its vocabulary, will give the key to any other English dialect we may find interesting, and make us free of the well of English into which Caedmon, Alfred, Layamon, Langland, Chaucer, and Shakespeare dipped.

I have no wish to do injustice to the Conference. Although their information is wrong and their proposals and methods as shown in my quotation from their Report, are mischievous, yet I am keenly conscious that their aim is to obtain strength and beauty of English speech, and such an ideal should have the best support of every cultured citizen.

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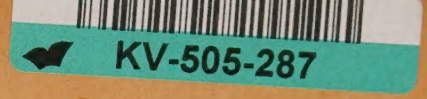
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